DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 309 888 PS 018 269

AUTHOR Savage, Maureen
TITLE Teaching and Learning Revisited by Practising Pre-School Teachers.
PUB DATE Jul 89
NOTE 20p.; Paper presented at the International Conference on Early Education and Development (21st, Hong Kong, July 31-August 4, 1989).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Curriculum Development; *Educational Strategies; Foreign Countries; Preschool Education; *Preschool Teachers; *Professional Continuing Education; *Professional Training; *Teacher Education Curriculum; Teacher Education Programs
IDENTIFIERS Australia (Victoria); *Reflection Methodology

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses problems of course and curriculum construction for a course for students at the Phillip Institute of Technology, Victoria, Australia, who were also practicing teachers. Since 1985 the early childhood staff at the institute have worked with groups of teachers who were employed in early childhood centers but whose previous studies were not recognized as being adequate for registration. In order to accommodate these students, a format was created in which students attended classes on campus one day a month, and worked alone, by telephone contact, and with small local self-help groups, the rest of the time. The model for the students' training was based on a tripartite view of professional expertise--technical skills, the application of theory and general principles, and critical analysis--enveloped by reflective thought and deliberate action. Students were expected to have a certain level of technical skills upon entering the program. Their previous training provided them with some general educational theory and principles and some techniques of critical analysis. The course concentrated on deliberate action and reflective thought. Units of the course covered child development, curriculum theory, the child in society, and individual projects. (RJC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED309888

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

TEACHING AND LEARNING REVISITED BY PRACTISING PRE-SCHOOL TEACHERS.

A Paper concerned with Teacher Education by
Maureen Savage
Senior Lecturer
School of Education
Phillip Institute of Technology
Victoria, Australia.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Maureen Savage
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

PS 01869

This paper is concerned with the problems of course and curriculum construction when the students are practising teachers. Since 1985 Early Childhood staff at Phillip Institute of Technology have been working with groups of teachers who are employed to work in Early childhood centres but whose previous studies (for primary qualifications) are not recognised as being adequate for registration as an early childhood teacher. In order to minimize the disruption of their employment and because the majority of these teachers live and work many kilometres from the Institute, it was decided to offer the retraining in a different format. The students attend on campus for one full day per month and work alone, by telephone contact and through small, local self help groups the remainder of the time.

The paradigm for their training is based on a model, evolved by the staff, which contains a tripartite view of professional expertise - technical skills; the application of theory and general principles; and critical analysis - surrounded and enveloped by refective thought and deliberate action.

As these students are already employed it is argued that they have been judged by their employers to have acquired a minimum level of technical skill. Their previous training has also provided them with some general educational theory and principles and some techniques of critical analysis, although we accept that more must be provided in each area. However it is in the fourth all encompassing area of reflective thought and deliberate action that the course concentrates. Reflective and critical analysis provides students with a method of examining and interpreting their own and current practices in early childhood centres, the theories and principles upon which early childhood has been historically based and the current theories and issues within the field. Further this course provides the time and opportunities for students to undertake the cycle of reflection - deliberate action - reflection.

This paper provides practical details of students' work and an opportunity for discussing theory in action.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

TEACHING AND LEARNING REVISITED

BY

PRACTISING PRE-SCHOOL TEACHERS.

Maureen Savage
School of Education
Phillip Institute of Technology
Victoria, Australia.

The title of this paper suggests the scenario I am about to set for you. This paper is concerned with the attempts by myself and my colleagues to provide a course which is "the best fit" between the needs of a clearly defined group of practising teachers and the state's requirement that they obtain a 'pre-service' qualification.

You may well ask how they can be practising but not qualified? The state regulations allow for employment (at a lower salary scale) for primary qualified teachers in early childhood centres when no person with an early childhood qualification can be found to fill the position. Many of these positions are part-time and /or are in centres in remote country areas which are not attractive to young, single teachers. Others are employed as temporary relief staff when the permanent job holder is on maternity or long service leave.

PS 018 369

For many years there was no avenue through which such people (all women) could obtain training. (A course previously offered at another College was terminated 10 years ago because of a believed lack of clientele). Phillip Institute of Technology, a tertiary College of Advanced Education situated in the northern suburbs of Melbourne, had often been approached by individuals enquiring about the possibility of being admitted to a suitable course. Over the years a small group of similar people had been allowed entry to the normal three year undergraduate course and granted a large number of subject exemptions, depending on their previous qualification. This avenue of training had proved to be largely unsatisfactory in terms of length of course and applicability to the

needs of the practising teacher entrants. It is difficult to meet the needs of two quite disparate groups - late adolescents/twenty year olds and practising teachers, in one class. The mismatch was certainly apparent to the academic staff, although the graduates professed themselves satisfied with the award of their eagerly desired qualification and their contribution to the education of the normal undergraduates was enormous. However it was obvious to all concerned that the needs of only a very small number of students could be dealt with through this avenue.

To set the scene further - Phillip Institute of Technology is one of three Victorian colleges of advanced education offering a course that leads to the award of the Diploma of Teaching (Early Childhood Education). This is the pre-service qualification required for registration as a pre-school or early childhood teacher i.e. it prepares teachers to work with children from 3 - 8 in a variety of educational and care situations.

However Phillip Institute of Technology admits only a small number of undergraduates to their course (30 each year) and as a newcomer to the field of early childhood education (1976) is not seen as **the** major provider of graduates for the profession. The artificial limit (imposed by the State authorities) on the number of graduates has provided the academic staff with the opportunity to concentrate on developing courses which will produce high quality graduates who will accept an active role in the profession and hold to the core values of early childhood i.e. values associated with the child, the family, the public, colleagues and self, such as are set out in the NAEYC list (Kipnis, 1987, p.29.)

The problem of mismatch between the needs of the prospective students and any proposed course was further aggravated by the inability of the Institute to free staff to enable them to teach where the students were located. Small courses mean only a small number of specialized early childhood staff. Phillip Institute has the equivalent of four fulltime staff in the early childhood section. Also students were not actually located in large numbers in any one town or area. The greatest number from any one town was four.

In 1985 as the result of an effective lobby by one particular Pre-school Advisor the following plan was put to prospective students - that an on campus/off campus model be adopted, with students attending the Institute one day per month (Thursday) for high density input while studying off campus through phone link ups and small self - organised tutorials. Staff were also to be available at any time (at the Institute or home through phone link. In practice this usually meant many calls were received at the weekend.

To maintain the "small is beautiful " image of the course only 25 students were to be admitted each year and the course would take two years (four semesters) to complete.

Who are these students?

The group has already been identified by occupation and by profession, but the question of who adult learners are is a much deeper and wider one than just those two parameters. This is particularly so when we consider the problems of course construction for retraining.

Jarvis (1987) claims that there is only one basic condition that needs to be met for a person to be classified as an adult learner and that is

"that a disjuncture exists between the present experience and the adult's biographies (present or future and idealised)" (p.191)

This disjuncture may be self-induced by the experiences of daily living or other-induced by forces external to the person. It is true that superficially the forces in this situation appear to be external i.e. the failure of the registering authorities to recognise their qualification. There is also present another self-induced disjuncture - an inner motivation - that drives them to apply. For every ten students we admit to the course there is probably an equal number working who do not seek to upgrade their qualification and are content to accept a lower level of salary and be under threat of

dismissal if a fully qualified graduate should challenge their employment.

All evaluation studies (see Hore, T. and West, L.H.T. (1980) and Kelly, S. (1979) of mature age entrants into training schemes comment on the personal development motivation of adult women learners and the high compensation, through increased personal and professional confidence, which is the pay off - despite heavy work loads and problems with family and personal commitments.

The high motivation of adult learners can in itself be a cause for anxiety. We probably all laughed heartily at Willy Russell's play "Educating Rita", but we also recognised the Ritas in our own classrooms and shuddered. Often their academic competence is dormant. They may not have been involved in tertiary studies since their teen- age student days and this can be anything up to 30 years ago. Expectations of students and the range of subjects offered in the curricula have changed in this time. Even the vocabulary of specific subjects areas (such as Developmental Psychology) can raise anxiety.

Their extreme motivation can raise problems in that they have unrealistic expectations of the amount of time which they can devote to study. Competing home, community and job commitments all vie within them causing further anxiety. Despite this daunting background of possible problems, very few of our students "drop out". A small number defer from their studies for either health or family reasons but all have returned to their studies within a year and completed their course.

All students come to us then with a high motivation, although it can range from the solely pragmatic"*I'm doing this for the piece of paper*" to the "*Personal satisfaction, challenge to a sluggish brain*" (Savage, 1988). Many commented on "*the feeling of being unqualified*" (ibid.) They know that they are perceived as primary teachers in a profession that fiercely guards its distinctive nature (Ebbeck and Clyde, 1988) and they want this course to provide them an entry card to what they perceive as a an elitist profession.

The problem then is one of providing the best fitting course for this wide range of needs and motivations.

The Course.

Kennedy (1987) states that before we can develop professional programs we must make definitions-

"Professional educators must define expertise, define the relationships between codified knowledge and experiences in the formation of expertise, and determine the appropriate type and scope of transitional experiences"

(Kennedy , 1987, p160).

Yet as we do this we must be aware that we are defining something that is not well understood - despite the myriad attempts at definition (Burdin and Lanzilotti, 1969) of teaching and teaching skills - and that any definition will limit the breadth and scope of teaching and thus the preparation of our graduates for the field.

Despite the Herculean nature of this task, that is what we attempted to do at Phillip Institute. The knowledge that our prospective students were atypical and the challenge of a new type of training, led us to be more reflective than the pragmatics of teacher training usually allow for.

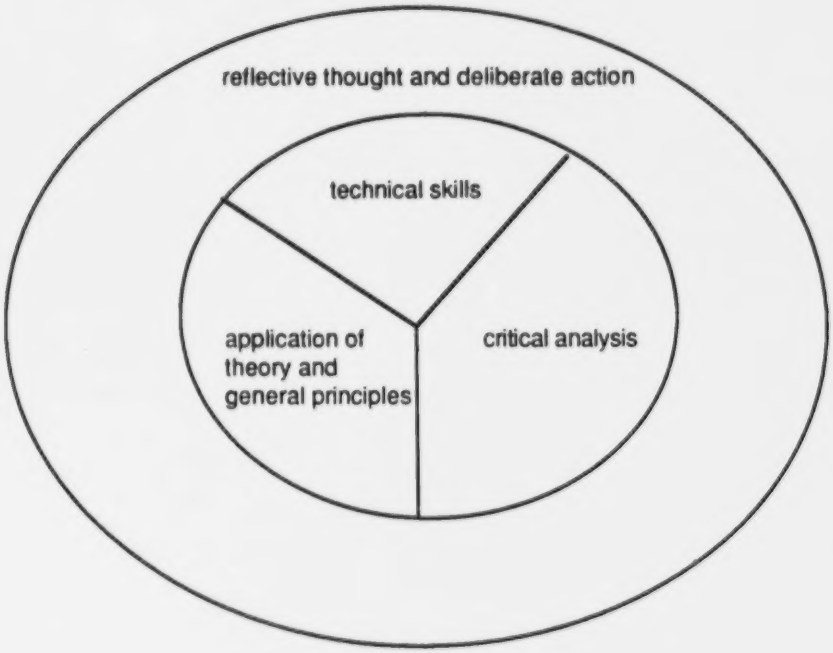
The following model that we developed owes a great deal to Jarvis (1987), Jones (1986), Kennedy (1987), Schon (1983) and Yonemura (1986). It is tripartite, in nature containing elements of

technical skills
application of theory and general principles
critical analysis;

all of which are surrounded by and filtered through -

reflective thought and deliberate action.

Figure 1. A Model of the Teaching Process.



Because in any teaching situation we draw on each area of our model we need to look at each and see how an emphasis was given to it through the course.

Technical Skills.

Every profession is in part defined by the skills which it displays. that We think of engineers as building bridges, doctors of performing operations and teachers as teaching children.

Teacher education has a particular history of passing on skills.

Who here remembers a technique they were taught in their training? For me it is *the Seven step method of teaching silent reading*. Many of our entrants thought that they were coming to a recipe course and even on graduating one or two still commented

(Savage, 1988) that the course had failed to "*provide them with enough practical things e.g. program ideas, evaluation records*". This emphasis on technical skills alone, my colleagues and I dub "the Women's Weekly approach" to teaching and made a conscious decision that we would not provide units based solely on technical skills. To qualify for entry all entrants had to establish that the employing authority/ies were satisfied with their technical skills, as they were, or recently had been employed as pre-school teachers.

The major problems with adapting a skills approach to curriculum, are that of identifying all the skills necessary in a profession, in transmitting these skills to the students and assuming that they will know when to apply the relevant skill. Skills education is a bottomless pit in education - there is always a new in-service program serving up yet another set of 'recipes' to the unwary. Those students and teachers who focus just on a skills approach misunderstand the wider nature of professional practice and yet exclusion of technical skills may also fail to facilitate practice, so it was thought necessary to give some consideration to this area.

At Phillip we handled this in a variety of ways:

First a class meeting commenced each on campus day and students could bring to the attention of their fellow students items of interest such as conferences to attend, in-service being offered in their area, new curriculum books and kits on the market.

Secondly on each on-campus day time was set aside for a 'problems clinic'. Students aired their concerns on practical matters which were occurring or had occurred in their Centre since we last met and fellow students made suggestions as to how such matters could be handled. Staff also sat in on these sessions and directed students to suitable resources i.e. people, library reading, curriculum kits etc.

Also students were required to observe in other early childhood settings as part of their assigned work. Some students were given

the opportunity to undertake an extended period of supervised practical training.

The Application of Theory and General Principles

Much criticism has been levelled at courses that are based solely on the application of theory and general principles.; - the academic 'head in the clouds' approach. This push to academic respectability has been noticeable in a number of emerging professions in the second part of this century; noticeable examples are business studies, journalism and education. This impetus is based on the lack of success of the total skills approach and yet once again courses based solely on a model of teaching as the general application of theory and general principles, deny the wider breadth of teaching.

Major questions which confront teacher trainers relate to such issues as how do we help students to see the relationship between general principles and the particular situations they will encounter in practice; and how in education are they to merge principles from so many different disciplines? This is particularly so in early childhood education - a profession that draws on so many disciplines.

Katz (1982) quoted Boyer (1968) as suggesting the following different disciplines on which the training for an early childhood worker should draw

> *"She should have a fair education... by this I mean she should have a doctorate in psychology and medicine. Sociology as a background is admirable. She should be an experienced carpenter, stonemason, mechanic, plumber and a thoroughly trained musician and poet and now at 83, she is ready."*
>
> (Katz, 1982, p.17)

To this Clyde (1988) has added

"ethnic and aboriginal studies, anthropology, ecology, legal studies, interpersonal relations, nutrition, administration, urban geography and legal studies" (page 45)

Other professions have struggled with this need to integrate principles derived from a variety of disciplines. Walton (1985) proposed a *vertical integration* , which would provide for practical experience and thoretical training simultaneously. We, at Phillip, believed that we had a built -in vertical integration in this course, as all students were practising teachers and were able to draw on a wealth of relevant past and present experiences in their theoretical studies. We were also aware that all students, as a result of previous studies, would have a theoretical background in general education. This course had a special interest in providing students with a background to the theories underlying early childhood education. One part of the course was thus concerned with studies in the history of early childhood, the philosophy underlying current programs and issues, and the developmental nature of children's growth, maturation and learning.

However it is not sufficient to build a course solely on providing rules of thumb (even if based on theory), to guide practice. The idea that a complex human situation can be codified into prescriptions is simplistic. Education is concerned with complicated judgements and teachers have *to learn how to decide* what to do.

Critical Analysis

The third area of expertise is still prescriptive but instead of recipes of skills and applications it prescribes a paradigm for examining and interpreting situations. The clearest cut example of this education is found in the law schools and is typified by the "case method " approach. The law schools claim that the results of this approach is that their graduates *'think like lawyers'*. The

obvious criticism that can be raised is that graduates, by having an overemphasis on process, fail to acquire the general principles and skills of the profession. They fail to have criteria on which to base their analysis and are often unable to view cases from any other perspective than that of the paricular paradigm. This failure may not only be a problem to the profession but to the society and community within which that profession operates. Sound judgements need to take place in wider contexts than just those of the profession. For example legal decisions affect peoples social relationships, their economic standing, familial patterns etc. etc. This method can be criticized because it is too successful. In legal schools it turns students into lawyers who believe that their only responsibilities are to their profession of law and not to the wider community.

Early childhood educators with statements such as -

"appreciation of the diversity of cultures within our society and protection ofthe cultural identity of children in each minority group."

and

"recognition and support for the interconnectedness of the child and family."

(AECA Background Paper, Feb. 1989)

have always recognised in their Codes of Ethics the wide backdrop against which our services are delivered.

In most teacher training courses there is some place given to critical analysis and this is traditionally done through the liberal arts component of undergraduate courses. For many reasons this cannot be deemed as a satisfactory answer to providing training in critical analysis. Within the present course under discussion there was no time for further liberal arts education. What general skills of critical analysis students had already gained would need to be further developed, but rather than providing this through general

liberal education, it could be done through the interaction between analysis and action.

DELIBERATE ACTION.

In the final evaluation of any professional preparation course, it is the product of that course which is on trial - the ability to transform students into graduates

"who are capable of deliberation about and critical examination of, their own actions and the consequences of those actions" (Kennedy, 1987, p.148)

are what we all aim for. This in no way denies all other aspects of this model. It assumes only that deliberate action is the result of knowledge of skills and principles, and reflective and critical analysis of these results.

The term "deliberate" is taken from the work of Schwab (1978) and follows through from the tradition of Dewey (1916). Schwab argues that

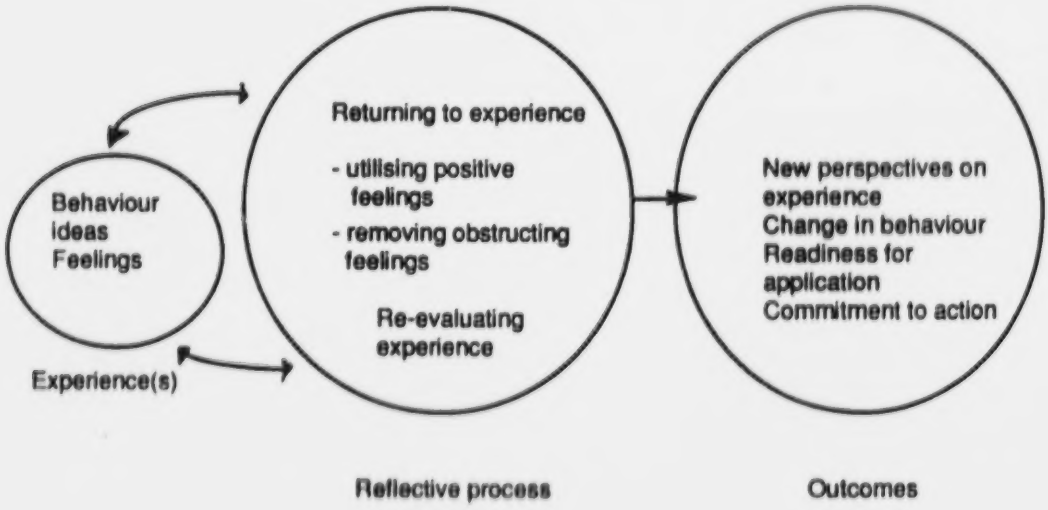
"the ability to successfully deliberate about courses of actions develops over time by observing ones own actions and their consequences" (ibid)

To be able to reflect on experience and to take deliberate action implies two conditions. Firstly, that one has had experience and secondly that one is in a position to take deliberate action. The conditions under which this course is offered meet both these requirements. Our students have had a multitude of experiences; many of which they need to make sense of, and - being currently in employment they have a variety of opportunities for deliberate action as participants. Furthermore they have a highly developed sense of purpose to act as a criteria on which to judge both ideas and action.

Finally their experiences and actions can be bounced off other professionals; that is academic staff and fellow students; for on this course the blend of knowledge and experience is extremely high. For example a student may bring up a practical problem with a child, a lecturer may quote a research finding, a fellow student may interpret that research finding in light of her previous experience in a similar situation. The group discussing the problem all have the opportunity to reflect and incorporate the discussion into their particular set of knowledge.

It is perhaps worthwhile considering Boud's model of the reflection process here and how it applies to students in this course.

Figure 2. The process of reflection Boud et al, (1985) p. 36.



Firstly, the emphasis that Boud et al (1985) and Jarvis (1987) both place on the personal and individual nature of reflective learning was extremely important to us at Phillip. Unfortunately the history of early childhood training courses in Australia has often led to a sameness of graduates. While a profession must be easily identified, a profession of clones leads to a closed profession.

If anything, Phillip staff have striven to revitalise the profession by questioning dearly held tenets and to graduate questioning teachers. We recognise that people can and do learn similar things if they have similar backgrounds and are exposed to similar experiences but ultimately what is learned and utilized will be personal (see Jarvis, 1987, p.25 for a complete learning model).

Secondly, reflection is a very complex process that involves feelings as well as thought. In discussing the motivation of students to undertake this course, we became aware of how much emotion has to do with motivation. Equally students bring to discussion a wide range of feelings associated with their problems and thus actions. In Early Childhood it is often difficult to finally define who are our clients. The former ethic of the child before all else, can not be so easily held to when one is aware of the interactions of the needs of parents, communities and society in general. Working so closely with parents and communities in small country towns, our teachers often have difficulty with this and need help to understand that emotive states can distort perception.

Another important aspect of reflection to the staff at Phillip, was the concept that reflection which produces action is change orientated and thus is implicitly political. Reflection need not be revolutionary but points to the fact that people can respond to one situation in more than one manner. An example of how this was considered in the material which students studied in this course was a brief unit on the history of early childhood where we analyzed the history of education through a feminist perspective. Then students undertook a small project surveying the history of a local early childhood service and analysing it in terms of its contribution to the wider early childhood profession and to the local community.

THE COURSE IN ACTION.

I would like to conclude this paper by giving you some further examples of how we encapsulated all these ideas into one short course. I have already mentioned a few examples. Perhaps you would be interested in the subject areas we defined. To meet the needs of student records officers and registrars all courses are made up of the building blocks of units and despite a new set of values we were forced into the old structures. Yet as we only had to provide 4 semester units covering 360 course hours (90 each) we were allowed a measure of flexibility.

The units are

1. Child Development - basically a study of Play and its role in children's development and learning.
2. Curriculum Theory - historical, societal issues.
3. The Child in Society - an opportunity to look at all those wider issues that are concerned in the provision of early childhood services.
4. Individual projects.

The last all encompassing title has, I believe, given us the opportunity to undertake some of our most innovative programs and I would like to expand on one particular experience we provided last year.

In September, 1988 the Australian Early Childhood Association was holding its Triennial Conference in Canberra. I had felt for some time that one role of a professional is to initiate younger members of the profession into professional societies and into the world of wider issues and concerns than that of day to day practicalities. Within professional groups there are opportunities for members to reflect, discuss and to analyse and thus to eventually take deliberate action.

Final year students on this course enrolled in the Individual Project were given the opportunity to choose to attend the AECA conference and to undertake certain related tasks as their Individual Project. Of the 25 students enrolled in the course, 20 undertook this option. Their reaction to this experience was the most moving that I have had in all my years in Teacher Education. I know that by providing this learning opportunity I directly effected a change in the development and learning of each of those individuals.

I would just like to highlight some of the events and effects:

Attitudinal changes to the Early Childhood profession:

" I was surprised and swept up by the atmosphere of excitement in most sessions"
" .... they weren't all nice ladies sitting around in white gloves"

The integration of ideas:

"... lots of different ideas seemed to be floating around in my head. After attending the Conference these ideas had fitted together. I understood that the early childhood years were not just a preparation for school"

Exposure to a wide range of excellent speakers and outstanding thinkers:

".... it was exciting to see that people whose articles and books we had read were real people working through ideas themselves"

Role modelling:

" I had thought that being a kindergarten teacher was the height of my ambition but I came away with other ideas and possibilities in mind"

Seeing themselves as a professional:

" I went as a student and came away as an early childhood professional"

Participation in the profession:

"*when is the next conference. I'm going and I'm taking my friends*"

I could go on listing the benefits but perhaps I should just conclude with this comment that the participating students were the best salespeople possible for this type of experience. The report they delivered to their classmates (both years were present) was the most professional and engrossing conference report I have ever been privileged to hear.

CONCLUSION

In finishing I hope that by now it has been obvious to you that our course construction is based on the models we have espoused when we looked at what teachers need . We have been through the same processes that we wish to lead our students through. We have analysed; we have attempted to test our ideas; we have conducted experiments (not all successful) and we have formulated some goals. Above all, we have found, along with others before us, that -

> *"once you start asking yourself how it might be different, change starts to creep in, risks and all."*
>
> (Jones, 1986, p.125)

Bibliography

AECA Background Paper (1989) A Code of Ethics for the Australian Early Childhood Profession, AECA, Canberra.

Boud, D., Keogh, R. & Walker, D. (Eds) (1985) Reflection: Turning Experience into Learning, Kogan Page, London.

Burdin, J.L., & Lanzilotti, K. (Eds.) (1969) A Reader's Guide to the Comprehensive Models for Preparing Elementary Teachers, ERIC, Washington, DC.

Clyde, Margaret (1988) The Early Childhood Worker As a Professional, Paper given at The First Years of Schooling Conference, Melbourne, Australia.

Dewey, J. (1916) Democracy and Education, The Free Press, New York.

Ebbeck, Marjory and Clyde, Margaret (1988) Early Childhood Teaching: The Disintegrated Profession? Early Childhood Development and Care, 34, pp.279 -285.

Jarvis, P. (1987) Adult Learning in the Social Context, Croom Helm, London.

Jones, Elizabeth (1986) Teaching Adults: An Active Learning Approach, NAEYC, Washington, DC.

Hore,T. and West, L.H.T. (Eds) (1980) Mature Age Students in Australian Higher Education, Higher Education Advisory and Research Unit, Monash University, Victoria.

Katz, Lilian, G. (1982) More Talks with Teachers, ERIC/EECE, Illinois.

Kennedy, Mary (1987) Inexact Sciences: Professional Education and the Development of Expertise in Review of Research in Education, AERA , 14, pp. 133 - 167.

Kelly, S. (1979) The Impact on Personal Relationships of the Returning to Study of Mature-age Students, unpublished Research Report, Swinburne, Victoria.

Kipnis, K. (1987) How to discuss Professional Ethics, Young Children, 42, 4, pp. 26 -30.

Savage, Maureen (1988) Survey of Advanced Standing Early Childhood Students in the Diploma of Teaching (Early Childhood Education), unpublished report Phillip Institute of Technology, Victoria.

Schon, D.A. (1983) The Reflective Practitioner, Basic Books, New York.

Schwab, J.J. (1978) Science, Curriculum and Liberal Arts: Selected Essays. (I. Westbury & N.J. Wilkoff (Eds) University of Chicago Press, Chigago.

Walton, H. (1985) Overview of themes in medical education. In S. Goodlad (Ed) Education for the Professions : Quis Custodiet...? NFER-Nelson, England.

Yonemura, Margaret V. (1986) A Teacher at Work: Professional Development and the Early Childhood Educator, Teachers' College Press, Columbia.